

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENNA 06718

STADIS//////////

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, MPOL, AU

SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN PURCHASE OF M60 TANKS

REFS: A) VIENNA 6704; B) STATE 180175;

C) CDR45ASAC ALEX VA 191945Z; D) VIENNA 4825

1. THE REFERENCED MESSAGES PROVIDE A CLEAR PICTURE OF THE CURRENTLY ENDANGERED STATUS OF THE AUSTRIAN GOVERNMENT'S DESIRE TO PURCHASE 50 MEDIUM TANKS (EITHER M60A1 OR M60A3) FROM THE UNITED STATES. TO COMPLETE THE PICTURE, I SHOULD LIKE TO REGISTER MY PERSONAL INTEREST IN THIS CASE AND TO EXPRESS MY CONVICTION THAT OUR INTERESTS ARGUE STRONGLY FOR THE DEPARTMENT TO DO EVERYTHING IT POSSIBLY CAN TO ENABLE US TO EXTEND THE APPROPRIATE LETTERS OF OFFER (LOA'S) TO THE GOA AND COMPLETE OTHER FORMALITIES PRIOR TO THE ORIGINALLY CONTEMPLATED DEADLINE OF OCTOBER 1, 1978.

2. OUR APPROVED POLICY FOR AUSTRIA HAS LONG BEEN TO INDUCE AUSTRIA -- AS GUARANTOR OF ITS OWN NEUTRALITY UNDER THE STATE TREATY TO WHICH WE ARE A PARTY -- TO MAINTAIN AS CREDIBLE A DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT AS POSSIBLE. LACKING THE INDUSTRIAL BASE OF SWEDEN OR THE FINANCIAL RESOURCES OF
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SWITZERLAND -- THE TWO COUNTRIES UPON WHICH AUSTRIA PATTERNS ITS NEUTRALITY -- THE GOA MUST TURN, ON THE ONE HAND, TO OTHER COUNTRIES FOR SOPHISTICATED DEFENSE SYSTEMS AND MUST FACE, ON THE OTHER, DIFFICULT DOMESTIC BUDGETARY AND POLITICAL OBSTACLES TO ALL BUT THE MOST MODEST ITEMS OF DEFENSE PROCUREMENT.

3. DESPITE THE LATTER CONSTRAINT, THE AUSTRIAN MOD INFORMED THE DAO IN MAY OF ITS UNEQUIVOCAL READINESS TO BUY TANKS FROM US TO REPLACE OBSOLETE TANKS IN ITS REGULAR FORCE. IT HAD ALSO DECIDED TO BUY TECHNICAL DATA PACKAGES TO UPGRADE OBSOLETE TANKS WHICH EVENTUALLY WILL AUGMENT MILITARY RESERVE STRENGTH AND ACTIVITIES. HAVING GOT THE GOA TO THIS POINT IN THE FACE OF UNFAVORABLE ODDS, IT WOULD BE MOST UNFORTUNATE IF WE WERE TO DROP THE BATON NOW. THE CASE IS RELATIVELY SMALL TO THE U.S., OF COURSE, BUT ITS SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION IS IMPORTANT FOR THE GOA AND SHOULD THEREFORE BE AN EFFECTIVE ADJUNCT TO OUR CONTINUING EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN THE BROADEST POSSIBLE INTERFACE BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES ON BOTH THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL LEVELS (ALWAYS, OF COURSE, CONSISTENT WITH AUSTRIA'S NEUTRAL POSTURE). OF RELEVANCE IN THIS CONTEXT IS THE GOA'S PRESENT AND PUTATIVE FUTURE WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST OR ELSEWHERE.

4. FINALLY, THE DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL THE DEGREE OF AUSTRIAN CHAGRIN WHICH WAS PRODUCED BY THE PRICING AND DELIVERY PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE MILITARY RADIO PURCHASE CASE. ESTABLISHING A PATTERN OF THIS SORT -- AND WITH A CASE INVOLVING MANY MORE DOLLARS -- IS SOMETHING WE CAN ILL AFFORD HERE. IN WHAT WE THEREFORE REGARD AS "EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES," I WOULD URGE THAT THE DEPARTMENT MAKE EVERY POSSIBLE EFFORT TO GET THE LOA'S TO THE CONFIDENTIAL

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GOA AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. WOLF

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